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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [AG](#)  
SUBJECT: PARLIAMENT SPEAKER PRAISES ONE MEPI PROGRAM,  
CAREFUL ON ANOTHER

Classified By: Ambassador Robert Ford, reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (U) The work of the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) has provided a valuable model for Algeria as it builds on its democratic foundation, according to Speaker of the National People's Assembly Amar Saadani. Saadani maintained that the apolitical approach of NCSL was an important reason for the organization's success in Algeria. The team's work served as a useful device for countering strong negative perceptions of the U.S. in the Arab world, he commented. (Note: NCSL was conducting a bill drafting workshop for the parliament.) Saadani cautioned Ambassador and Poloff at their September 16 meeting, however, that it would be helpful for members of Congress to visit Algeria to show the U.S. legislature's interest in working with Algerian counterparts. Such a visit would provide a good backdrop against which the NCSL could work, he suggested. Ambassador cautioned that he could not bring members of Congress to Algeria. By contrast, he noted, the Algerian government could work through its embassy in Washington to find ways to bring a congressional delegation to Algiers, and the U.S. Embassy in Algiers would be delighted to help on the margins.

¶2. (U) Saadani stressed that Algeria was exceptional within the Middle East, referencing press freedoms and his own election in what he called a very transparent process. (He pointed to the glass ballot boxes used in the 2002 elections and added quote No general picked me. I was elected. End quote.) He warned that lumping Algeria, with its own specific circumstances, along with other Arab countries in MEPI programs makes it harder for the Algerians to accept American project work.

¶3. (C) The Ambassador sought Saadani's assistance with National Democratic Institute programs in Algeria. The NDI program, he underlined, aims to increase Algerian public support for existing political parties and Algerian institutions. Saadani professed ignorance about the visa problems this month and made no commitment. He left his comment with a friendly but clear warning of quote You are planting date trees on the shore and that is not easy. Choose carefully where you plant. End Quote. When Saadani later pressed for more contacts between the U.S. Republican and Democratic parties and Algerian political parties, Ambassador reminded him that GoA obstacles to NDI work will make it harder to convince either American party to seek engage with Algerians. Saadani nodded his understanding and said he would check into the problem while carefully avoiding any commitment.

¶4. (C) Comment: Saadani was relatively stiff in the meeting, but he clearly wanted it and had his staff scurrying around the evening of September 15 to set it up on short notice once

they got approval from the Algerian MFA. He wants MEPI projects that work with the Parliament, but the best pitch in his view is one that is more bilateral than multilateral; involving other Arabs can be problematic. Moreover, in typical Algerian fashion, Saadani does not want to be seen as a very junior partner - hence his interest in seeing a Codel here. Meanwhile, the well-attended NCSL workshop on bill drafting concluded September 20, and we have heard good things about it from Abdelkader Bensaleh, the head of the Algerian Senate, in addition to the remarks of Saadani above. By contrast, both Bensaleh and Saadani are more cautious about the NDI program work. Over the weeks ahead we will stress the benefits of the NDI program here to a wide array of Algerian parliamentarians, political party workers and others. In the end, we need more Algerians, in addition to the U.S. Embassy, to be advocates for the NDI program .

FORD